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ABSTRACT

This study examined female adolescent characters portrayed in over 200 episodes of 19 prime time television programs aired in the spring of 1988, and analyzed the messages these programs conveyed about education and work. It was found that although adolescent girls outnumbered adolescent boys on prime time television, these female characters were portrayed in a limited fashion as they focused on shopping, grooming, and dating to the exclusion of other interests and activities. The adolescent female characters were also more passive and less individualized than their male counterparts. Nearly invisible in the weekly plots were conversations with parents, teachers, or peers on school matters, academic interests, career goals, or future plans. The adolescent girls portrayed on television also occupied a narrow socioeconomic status, coming from either middle class or upper-middle class backgrounds. However, some good examples can be found. Scattered throughout the episodes monitored were glimpses of intelligent girls who were also well liked, teenagers linking their interests to possible careers, and parents involved in their teenagers' futures. (EW)

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Growing Up in Prime Time

An Analysis of Adolescent Girls on Television

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Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW) is a national women's employment organization which works to achieve economic independence and equal opportunity for women in the workplace. The National Commission on Working Women, which merged with WOW in January, 1987, advocates on behalf of women in non-professional occupations. These women represent 39 million workers and 77% of the female labor force.

GROWING UP IN PRIME TIME

An Analysis of Adolescent Girls on Television

Written by Sally Steenland

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ABOUT THE COMMISSION:

The National Commission on Working Women of Wider Opportunities for Women works to improve the economic status of the 39 million women in non-professional occupations who constitute 77% of the female work force in the United States. Commission issues include fair wages, child care, education and training, and dignity in the workplace.

The Commission is led by a multi-sector advisory group composed of corporate and labor union leaders, congressional officials, educators, media representatives, women's advocacy leaders, and working women themselves. These sectors bring diverse experiences and various points of view to Commission deliberations, resulting in broad-based effective strategies.

Early in its history the Commission selected the media as an area of prime concern. Research has documented the importance of television in society: It is a powerful shaper of our attitudes, behavior and knowledge of the world. Research has also documented the treatment of women on television: Their portrayal tends to be stereotyped, narrow, and unrepresentative of the rich diversity of real women's lives. Because of the power of these accumulated images of women, the Commission has developed projects that increase the visibility and eradicate the stereotypes of women on television.

Beginning in 1979, Commission media projects have included the following activities:

* Sponsorship of the annual Women at Work Broadcast Awards competition which honors the nation's best television and radio programs about working women;

* Publication of annual critiques of the fall TV season analyzing the image of female characters on the new shows;

* Creation of a national symposium for TV and radio producers, directors, and advocacy groups to discuss the status of women in the broadcasting industry;

* Sponsorship of a 10-day museum exhibit of award-winning TV programs about working women and a concurrent seminar series;

* Publication of a "viewer scorecard" to increase audience awareness of television's portrayal of women;

* Publication of reports analyzing children and families on prime time television and of the image of older women on TV;

* Creation of media watch training workshops focusing on midlife and older women's portrayal in the media;

* Publication of an employment report analyzing the status of women producers, writers, and directors on prime time TV.

"Growing Up in Prime Time: An Analysis of Adolescent Girls on Television" is the most recent project in the Commission's 10-year history of media work. The report will be distributed to national and grass roots women's organizations, youth groups, educational institutions, and labor unions as part of a public education campaign encouraging viewers to respond to media portrayals in an organized way. The report will also be sent to the television networks and production studios and its findings discussed as part of an ongoing dialogue on women and television between the Commission and the TV industry.

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INTRODUCTION AND HIGHLIGHTS

According to the Nielsen ratings, close to one million adolescent girls watch prime time network television programs every night. Beginning in the early evening, many of the programs they view contain adolescent female characters near them in age. But there the resemblance ends, for the adolescent females appearing nightly on entertainment TV hardly reflect the diverse make-up of real life teenagers, nor do the programs pay attention to basic issues of growing up, such as ability in school, job interests, aptitudes and skills.

Night after night, on over two dozen episodes a season, teenage viewers see their counterparts on the screen poised for professional careers and productive adulthoods, but viewers rarely catch a glimpse of the steps one must take to achieve those goals.

The cumulative result of these skewed depictions is a distorted message about the realities of growing up. Such inaccurate messages are of consequence in a society where millions of real life teenage girls are ill prepared for a lifetime of work and face greater economic risk than boys their age.

For example:

* Girls in high school today will spend more than 30 years of their adult lives in the work force.
* Almost half of today's teenage girls will be the sole support of their families, during at least part of their adult lives.

* Today's female high school graduates, over the course of their working lives, can expect to earn less money than a man with an 8th grade education.

* Despite almost two decades of movement toward sex equity in education and vocational training for girls, over three-quarters of all women continue to work in low-paying, nonprofessional jobs in generally "female" occupations. Women continue to make on average 65 cents for every dollar earned by men.

These economic realities underscore the importance of preparing teenage girls realistically and thoroughly for an adulthood of work. Not only are schools, counselors, teachers, parents, youth groups and community organizations responsible for this task, so is television. Television's adolescent female characters are important role models for teenage viewers and are able to influence attitudes and behavior. However, their portrayals are both narrow and unrealistic.

Currently, adolescent girls are featured in continuing roles on 19 prime time entertainment shows on network television. Yet very few programs portray these characters with realism and depth, especially where education and work issues are concerned. Week after week, the missed opportunities are legion. Although a program episode will occasionally touch on an important aspect of work or education, far more frequently a show will present an array of outmoded and damaging stereotypes of teenage girls.

Missing altogether from most of these television programs are the continuing character development and recurring stories woven in show after show that reveal to viewers the interests, aptitudes and career goals of teenage girls on TV. Instead, viewers are likely to see girls with no visible skills, no favorite subjects in school, no discussions about college majors or vocational plans. Added together, these images create the impression that one can magically jump from an adolescence of dating and shopping to a well-paid professional career.

"Growing Up in Prime Time," the Commission's tenth report examining women and the media, analyzes the character portrayals and messages transmitted regarding education and work on television programs featuring adolescent girls. Over 200 program episodes were monitored for this report.

Highlights from the report include:

* On TV, girls' looks count more than their brains. Plots focus on shopping, grooming and dating, to the exclusion of other interests and activities. In fact, episodes from some series portray intelligent teenage girls as social misfits.
* Although adolescent girls outnumber adolescent boys on prime time TV, their characters are more passive and less individualized than male characters'. Adolescent male characters are more often the center of the action.
* Nearly invisible in weekly plots are conversations with parents, teachers or peers about school matters, academic interests, career goals, or future plans.

* Adolescent girls on TV occupy a narrow range on the socio-economic spectrum. Ninety-four percent are middle class or wealthy, while very few are working class or poor. In reality, over one-third of teenage girls live in families with annual incomes under $20,000.

* Good examples can be found. Scattered throughout the episodes monitored were glimpses of intelligent girls who are also well liked; teenagers linking their interests to possible careers; and parents involved in their teenagers' future.

A SNAPSHOT OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS ON TELEVISION

Of the 19 network television programs containing adolescent girls monitored for this report during the spring, 15 are situation comedies and four are dramas. Fourteen programs take place in the home, while five are set in schools. A total of 32 adolescent girls appear regularly on these programs. Unlike adult female characters, who are out-numbered by males on prime time TV, adolescent girls outnumber their male counterparts: 24 boys appear regularly on the prime time schedule.

Education and Employment: All of TV's adolescent females attend school. Of those in high school, virtually all plan to attend college after graduation, rather than enter the work force. Only a few teenage girls on TV hold part-time jobs while attending school.

In reality, about sixty percent of female high school graduates enter college the fall following graduation. Over half (53%) of teenage girls who are working age have jobs. Forty-two percent of high school girls have jobs, while fifty-seven percent of female college students work.

Family Economics: Over eighty percent of TV's adolescent females, on shows set both in the home and school, live in middle class families. Thirteen percent are upper middle class or wealthy, while only six percent live in families that are working class or poor.

In reality, less than one-quarter of high school girls live in families with incomes over $40,000. Thirty-eight percent live in families with incomes between $20,000 and $40,000; nineteen percent

have family incomes between $10,000 and $20,000; while fifteen percent of high school girls live in families with incomes under $10,000.

Working Parents: Seventy-one percent of TV's adolescent females featured on shows set in the home have mothers who work in the labor force; all the mothers have professional careers. Seventy-three percent of adolescent girls on TV have fathers who work in professional careers; twenty-seven percent have fathers employed in nonprofessional jobs.

In reality, sixty-nine percent of teenagers have mothers in the labor force; however, only twenty-four percent have professional jobs. In reality, only twenty-five percent of men work in professional careers, while seventy-five percent have nonprofessional jobs.

Family Composition - Over half of TV's adolescent females appear in shows whose setting is a home where parents, relatives and siblings are also regular characters. Over half (53%) live in families with three or more children; twenty-four percent have one sibling, while an additional twenty-four percent are only children.

In reality, only nineteen percent of all American families have three or more children; thirty-seven percent have two children, and forty-three percent have only one child.

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

It is in the area of education and work preparation that entertainment television programs aimed at teenage viewers fall most short of the mark. For they portray a world of attractive adolescent girls with promising futures and successful mothers without providing any clues as to how these teenagers on TV will achieve their goals. The character portrayals lack detail and depth, and plots revolving around school and work issues scarcely exist.

For example, adolescents like Heather on "Mr Belvedere," Lynn on "ALF," Samantha on "Who's the Boss?," and Brenda on "227" are characters whose personalities are rarely fleshed out beyond shopping and boys. Although they are occasionally seen doing homework at the kitchen table, that opportunity sparks no further plot development. On certain shows tantalizing clues are dropped: Carol on "Growing Pains" is an A-student with a perfect attendance record; Lynn on "ALF" wants to attend Amherst College. However, these clues function only as props for plots that develop along other lines, and viewers don't become familiar with the particulars of Carol the student, nor do they share the details of planning for college with Lynn.

One program exemplary in its treatment of adolescent girls is "Our House," which features Chris who wants to be an astronaut. Rather than devote one episode to the subject of her career plans and then drop it, the show, since its beginning, has woven this theme throughout numerous episodes so that it has become an integral part of Chris's character. Viewers know she wanted to take math classes that her school didn't offer and that she paid for flying lessons with her own money. The details of her hopes, revealed week after

week, add interest and authenticity to her character. In addition, they're a good illustration of how to link interests to a career and how to plan for that career.

On no other prime time program featuring high school girls is consistent attention paid to their specific achievements and skills. Even on a program such as "Head of the Class," which takes place in a high school and features five bright girls, they are portrayed as generically smart, compared to the male characters who are more fleshed out: Dennis is a computer whiz, Arvid a math genius, Eric a brilliant writer. In contrast, viewers are hard pressed to identify the particular areas of academic brilliance in Simone, Sarah, Maria, Darlene, or Janice.

The problem becomes more acute in college, where TV episodes too often use school as a prop for other interests and concerns, such as roommate clashes, crushes on professors, and coffee shop gossip. On "A Different World," five female characters have been in college for two years with little talk of a major, or even favorite subjects. As a result, regular viewers of this show have little clue what these young women will do upon graduation.

On some shows, majors are identified. Kristin on "Day By Day" is a psychology major working at a day care center. On "Facts of Life," Tootie is a theater major hoping for a career as an actress; Natalie is a communications major who's a part-time reporter for a local newspaper and wants to be a writer. Mallory, on "Family Ties," has linked her love of shopping and clothes to a fashion design major at Grant College.

Ironically, the population group portrayed with the least gender bias on television are young children. On "The Cosby Show," young Rudy wants to be Frankenstein instead of a princess for Halloween, while on "Family Ties," Andy, who's in kindergarten, plays with Barbie dolls and bakes cookies. Threaded throughout program episodes are subplots and instances in which sexual stereotypes are broken down and young children have ambitious, unconventional ideas of what they can do and be as adults.

Although television programs featuring adolescent girls are devoid of plots revolving around school and work plans, they are filled with plots that focus on other serious social issues. Many of these issues are dramatic in nature, such as teenage suicide, homelessness and sex. Other issues, such as divorced parents, are less dramatic but still receive consistent attention from television's writers. However, their scope of stories needs to be broadened to include the universal issues of education and work that are involved in preparing for adulthood.

LOOKS COUNT MORE THAN BRAINS

If there is a continuous theme involving adolescent girls that television pursues week after week, it is that of shopping, grooming and dating. With few exceptions, adolescent girls are portrayed on TV as shopping-mall addicts, whose competing main interests in life are clothes, make-up and boys.

Lynn, an extremely pretty teenager on "ALF," feels ugly and depressed because her boyfriend danced several dances with a blond cheerleader at a party. She still feels ugly several days later and is entered in a beauty contest to improve her self-esteem.

Samantha on "Who's the Boss?" is devastated to be home on a Saturday night without a date to the tenth grade dance. Her father fixes her up with a socially-conscious boy who becomes her boyfriend. In contrast to his conversations about the environment and politics, almost all of Samantha's conversation revolves around shopping in malls and buying clothes.

The twin boys on "The Hogan Family" are paired to two girls in their class as part of a computer project predicting their future. The twin couples are supposed to be married and use computer projections to plan their budget, purchases, and vacations. One of the girls, who is smart, wears glasses, conservative clothes, and puts her hair in a bun. The popular girl, who is depicted as unintelligent, wears trendy clothes and applies make-up during homework sessions. In the computer assignment describing their future, the boy-husbands are given careers while the girl-wives are not. In the end, the smart girl turns out to be a better wife

because she is more supportive of her husband and gives better advice. The popular girl is less successful as a wife since she fritters money away on shopping and cruises and, in so doing, destroys her husband's career. Both girls are evaluated in terms of how they helped or did not help their husbands; neither is given a life of her own.

On "Facts of Life" a high school student is called into the principal's office for stuffing socks in her chest to make it appear larger. "Did I overboob?" she asks. Jokes about the female chest are abundant, with comments such as "boys have bigger boobs than you," and "it's no fun being the only girl with a training bra and nothing to train." Aside from her chest, there is no other dimension to her character.

On "Head of the Class," Darlene, the editor of the school newspaper appoints her best friend, Sarah, to be assistant editor. Both are brilliant students. However, the plot focuses on competitiveness and their jeopardized friendship as Darlene's boyfriend begins to date Sarah. Before they resolve their conflict, they have also threatened the issue of the newspaper.

Kevin, a college student on "Mr. Belvedere," is invited to join a fraternity whose initiation rites include inviting the ugliest girl on campus to a dance. As his friends search for "sweathogs," "geeks," and "trollettes," Kevin is advised to check out the girls track team for "premiere pooches." He meets a bright chemistry student in the library (who begins doing his chemistry homework for him) and inadvertently invites her to the dance. Once there, she learns why she was invited by a young woman who's come several years

in a row. The young woman confides to Kevin's date over the punch bowl, "When I was first asked to one of these, I was kind of hurt, but then I figured it beats sitting around the dorm all night waiting for pizza to come. Besides, if these guys get enough punch in them, a girl might get lucky." Kevin's date, embarrassed and hurt, retreats to the library where he finds her alone with her books. Throughout the "Mr. Belvedere" episode, the smart girl is portrayed as clumsy, homely, unpopular, unsure of herself and desperate for a date. She wears glasses, as do most of the other girls at the "bowser ball." For these girls without dates, studying at the library on a Friday night is cruel punishment, as is eating pizza in the dorm on a weekend with roommates and female friends. According to the show, the drunken advances of a boy who thinks they are ugly and dates them as a joke are preferable.

Scattered program episodes on other TV shows do reveal adolescent girls who are intelligent and also well-liked. Carol in "Growing Pains" is an A-student with a steady boyfriend, while Jennifer on "Family Ties" is extremely bright yet considered likeable. None of the brilliant high school girls on "Head of the Class" (except for Janice the child prodigy) is considered odd because of her intelligence.

However, these characters are the exception rather than the rule. Far more typical are adolescent female characters who have little more than passing interest in their own intelligence, whose motivation lies in looking pretty for boys, and whose attention and energy are absorbed by shopping. These characteristics may, in the television writer's mind, create a recognizable teenage girl but,

given the absence of other qualities to balance the portrayal, send damaging messages to teenage viewers.

BOYS STILL GET THE ACTION

In addition to distorted portrayals, adolescent girls are less dominant and more passive than boy characters their age. Even though they outnumber teenage boys in programs, the plots usually revolve around the boys, with the girls functioning as side-kicks or background characters.

"Mr. Belvedere," in particular, focuses on the two sons, Kevin and Wesley, to the exclusion of Heather, who is most often seen reading a magazine on the living room couch or responding to her brothers' wise cracks. Occasionally she is involved in a subplot, such as wanting to change her name or participating with her father in a school sports event, but almost never does the main plot revolve around Heather's character.

Likewise, "Growing Pains" focuses its main attention on Mike, the eldest son. He interacts more with his parents and is usually the center of the action, while Carol, his sister, has the role of reacting to him. The details of Mike's character are more fleshed-out than his sister's, and his friends and teachers are more visible than hers.

In actual classrooms, researchers have documented that teachers spend more time prodding, encouraging, coaching and challenging boy students than girls. Without intending to, teachers focus most of their attention on boys. This gender bias can also be found in television's classrooms. For example, on "Head of the Class," Mr. Moore talks to the boys more than to the girls. This occurs not only when the plots focus specifically on various boys in the class but also when the plots supposedly involve the whole group of students.

Girls do participate, but they are less active than the boys, who dominate the classroom.

Boys also get the action when dating girls. In a throw-back to outmoded social behavior, some television programs derive humor from boys scoring with their dates.

For example, on "Mr. Belvedere," Kevin says to his family, "No dinner for me, thanks. Cindy invited me over and said I could have anything I want."

On "Facts of Life," Andy talks constantly of making advances to females of every age, as do the boys who integrate the private girls school featured in the program. Adam, a short, skinny pre-teen who attends the school, describes himself as constantly "stimulated."

In an unfortunate role reversal, television portrays some young female characters as ready-to-pounce, sexually aggressive animals as well. On an episode of "Who's the Boss?" a young practical nurse, depicted as a dim-witted buxom blonde, claims she entered nursing after failing beauty school where she was undone by the pressure of remembering different shades of nail polish. Unable to wash a dish or run an appliance, she's eager to give Tony, her patient, a sponge bath. "I'm Doreen the practical nurse," she purrs. "I do it all."

MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

Most disappointing of all in television programs about adolescent girls are the missed opportunities to develop three-dimensional characters with visible skills and interests. Instead, characters tend to be shallow and one-dimensional. Other opportunities are missed as well. Unlike the real world, where teenage girls occupy a diverse range of the spectrum, TV's adolescent females are too much alike. Moreover, television programs focused on adolescent girls miss countless opportunities for parent/teenager discussions on matters of school and work.

The more than two hundred television programs monitored for this report did not reveal a single program devoted to any female character's academic activities or career plans as a major part of the plot. School and work issues received minor attention in scattered episodes that were monitored, but a consistent focus was nonexistent. This lack of attention is especially glaring considering that forty-seven percent of adolescent girls on TV appear in school settings. Because of such missed opportunities, regular viewers are more likely to be familiar with their favorite female character's taste in fashion than her intellectual aptitude.

Sometimes the portrayals are one-dimensional because the adolescent females are peripheral to the show. Programs such as "227," "A Year in the Life," and "The Bronx Zoo" feature adolescent girls in regular but supporting roles; the plots almost always focus on the major characters who are adults. Because of this limited visibility, the writers and producers of such shows have a special

responsibility to convey authentic images of adolescent females to viewers, since their appearances are so infrequent.

Likewise, television misses opportunities to present a range of teenage girls, especially socio-economically. In the real world, teenage girls are more apt to be working class or poor than those on TV. They are more likely to live in families with financial difficulties, and they are less likely to have a wide range of options concerning their future. For such teenage girls, for whom a college education at parental expense is not an automatic option, television provides almost no role models. No adolescent girls on TV enter the work force upon graduation from high school; none struggles to pay for her higher education. Jaleesa on "A Different World" is an older college student who has a part-time job working in the library during the school year and works as a cable TV installer during the summer. However, the details of her financial predicament do not receive much attention.

Roz on "The Bronx Zoo" is unique in prime time because she is the only adolescent female on TV living in poverty. Struggling with school work and the financial needs of her family, she alone represents the experiences of thousands of teenage girls in the real world. However, she is a minor character on the show. If she appeared more frequently, an invisible segment of society would have a greater voice.

Television's families are well-known for their open, easy communication, especially among adolescents and their parents. Teenagers confide the details of their first kiss, their feelings of social inadequacy, and their darkest fears. Parents, in turn, listen

to their offspring in a nonjudgmental, sensitive manner, and almost always offer well-reasoned advice without being too forceful. The problem gets solved.

Despite this open communication, parents on TV rarely talk with their teenagers about school and work issues. Except for occasional yelling about low grades or bad behavior in school, parents are strangely silent when it comes to some of the most important aspects of growing up. Missing from shows are parent/teenager advice and guidance sessions about school and work -- one's hopes for the future, balancing getting married and having a career, the challenge of using one's brain and testing one's ability in the world. Indeed, such issues remain unexplored, providing viewers no clue as to the steps teenagers must take to prepare for adulthood.

GLIMMERS OF HOPE

Despite television's overall lack of attention to the academic ability and occupational future of its adolescent female characters, sporadic attention is paid to these concerns.

On "Growing Pains," for instance, Carol, who's an outstanding student, becomes engaged to her steady boyfriend in her junior year of high school. After the excitement of her friends and the shock of her parents passes, she realizes that her dreams for the future do not coincide with her boyfriend's; she wants to go to Harvard, while he's hoping for a football scholarship to a Big Ten school in the midwest. Marrying immediately after high school would jeopardize her college plans, so Carol gives back the ring.

On "Family Ties," Alex's girlfriend Lauren is a psychology major whose love of the field filters through her conversation and who influences Alex to learn more about the subject. Viewers see Lauren in the psychology lab performing experiments and doing research. She is pretty, appealing, ambitious and bright.

For nine years on "Facts of Life," viewers have watched Blair and Jo grow up. Now in their early twenties, working-class Jo is a social worker at a community center, while wealthy Blair is in her last year of law school.

On "Day by Day," Ross the teenage son is frequently seen in a nontraditional male role, playing with preschoolers in the daycare center his parents run out of their home. In one episode, he's so successful at an impromptu lesson that he decides to become a teacher. Although his parents encourage him to pursue teaching as a worthwhile career, they also emphasize the preparation and training

it involves. "You can't just wing it; you must learn how to teach," his mother says.

Confused because teaching looked easy, Ross wonders how people select careers and plan their future. He looks at a poster of Prince, the rock star, on his bedroom wall and says, "He's got such a great career. I wonder how he decided what to do with his life. Was it a gradual thing, or did he just get up one morning and say, 'I know what I'd be good at --getting up on stage and playing a guitar in my purple underwear'?" His parents explain that with most people, deciding on a career is a gradual thing; they tell him why they chose to be teachers and point out some of the rewards and pressures of the job.

On an episode of "A Different World," Denise learns discipline and persistence as she joins the track team. A naturally fast runner, Denise is exhilarated by her initial victories. However, she becomes frustrated and discouraged after the rigor of daily practices. She confides to a friend, "I love being on the team; I love all the attention we get, but I don't know if I can take this hard work. It's not what I thought it would be." Her friends help her to realize that practice, which is unglamorous and exhausting, is a prerequisite to the excitement of winning a meet and that she should stay on the team.

On "227" Calvin jeopardizes his college future by flunking history. Despite the pleadings of his grandmother to study, he remains unconcerned, convinced he will get a basketball scholarship in spite of his failure in history. However, when his failing grade puts him off the team and removes his chances of a sports

scholarship, Calvin realizes the importance of studying and gets a passing grade as he takes his history exam the second time.

On "Our House," teenager Chris, her mother and grandfather can't agree on whether Chris should take a part-time job in a gift shop. Chris wants the job for the cash it will provide; her mother thinks Chris is busy enough with school-work and extra-curricular projects, while her grandfather thinks the job will teach responsibility and is a good idea. Chris ends up taking the job, learning how to juggle a work schedule with her school work and social activities.

And on "The Cosby Show," Vanessa demonstrates her mathematical ability by teaching her father the principals of new math. She then challenges him to a contest where they both calculate the dimensions of a book shelf, Cliff using old math, Vanessa using new. Vanessa wins.

CONCLUSION

In contrast to the world of real teenage girls, the world of TV's teenage girls is a secure one with a promising future. Despite little attention paid to school work, virtually all will attend college. Despite little interest in their economic future, most are expected to have professional careers.

TV's parents are depicted as successful adults. All live comfortably, while many are quite affluent. It is assumed that their teenagers will repeat these patterns of success.

But, by failing to provide even a rudimentary bridge between the two worlds -- that of adolescents and adults -- television misses their continuity and ignores some of the most important aspects of growing up.

Two of these aspects, attention to school and to a future of work, have been analyzed in this report. Their near invisibility on prime time TV not only misses opportunities to entertain but also misleads teenage viewers. At a time when the drop-out rate for female high school students is far too high because girls do not see the critical connection between a high school diploma and their long-term economic future; when millions of teenage girls are still selecting a narrow range of career options because that is all they can see for themselves; and when pregnancy and early motherhood cripple the futures of half a million teenage girls every year; television has an obligation to paint a more realistic picture of the journey to adulthood and to provide role-models which teenage viewers can link to their own lives.

This would not be difficult to do. Just as TV's writers tackle social issues in depth (such as drugs and teen suicide), and provide weekly continuity to adolescent characters regarding boyfriends and clothes, so too writers could explore a broader range of issues and character detail.

In addition, writers could create adolescent female characters with greater economic diversity. Television rarely sees adolescent females for whom college is not an automatic option, although such girls exist in the real world. Female characters who work in nontraditional jobs to earn a living wage, or who struggle at low-paid work while planning a brighter future, or who put themselves through school learning a trade or profession do not yet exist on the screen, although their real life counter-parts number in the millions.

For example, television writers could create more characters like Roz on "The Bronx Zoo" and give them greater visibility. They could explore more thoroughly the academic interests of the female students in "Head of the Class;" and they could identify majors and vocational interests for female characters in college, like Emma and Jenny on "Kate and Allie" and the characters on "A Different World." High school girls like Heather on "Mr. Belvedere" could become more fully developed, while adolescents like Nicole on "My Two Dads" and Samantha on "Who's the Boss?" could be featured in plots that revolve more around ability and less around boys.

Nearly a million adolescent girls watch TV every evening. Most of them are watching programs containing teenagers like themselves. Television would do well, as an entertainment and educational medium,

to detail with authenticity the path its characters follow from adolescence to adulthood. Such a detailed trip, if done effectively, would give teenage viewers much-needed clues on their own journey to becoming adults.

REPORT METHODOLOGY

"Growing Up in Prime Time" analyzes the images of adolescent females on network prime time television series and the messages they transmit regarding education and work. During the spring of 1988, programs containing adolescent female characters in recurring roles were monitored on a random basis. Over 200 programs were monitored altogether. For each female character, the following information was coded: age, race, socio-economic status of family, occupation of mother and father, and family size.

The following programs were studied for this report:

A Different World	Head of the Class
A Year in the Life	Kate and Allie
Aaron's Way	Mr. Belvedere
ALF	My Sister Sam
The Bronx Zoo	My Two Dads
The Cosby Show	Our House
Day by Day	Who's the Boss?
Facts of Life	The Wonder Years
Family Ties	227
Growing Pains	

In addition, programs containing only adolescent boys, such as "The Hogan Family" and "Cagney and Lacey," were studied for this report.